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# **Developing and sustaining university teaching expertise in times of change**

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**A narrative study with award winning university teachers**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education, at the University of Technology, Sydney**

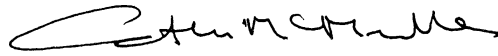
**February 2008**

### **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. J. R. M. K.", is written above a horizontal line.

**To Kevin McMullen (1920-2006)**

**Lifelong learner extraordinaire**

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## Abstract

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Excellence in teaching and learning is currently a focus of much debate in the higher education sector both in Australia and worldwide. While the complexity inherent in defining and developing excellence is broadly acknowledged, there is limited understanding of how teaching expertise is developed and sustained in times of change. This study addresses this issue and explores the way university teachers engage in their own developmental process, fashioning and refashioning their identities to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing workplace characterised by a multiplicity of demands.

The use of a narrative approach opens up new possibilities for examining the development of teaching expertise, in ways that promote a more complex understanding of the dynamics of teaching and learning in the contemporary university environment. A narrative approach offers a number of advantages over traditional methods of studying expertise. It has the capacity to reflect the complexity of individual and social lives, the ambiguity and the contradictions. It can also elicit practical and personal knowledge stories that can be used to understand and communicate subtle aspects of expertise.

University teaching, like many professional areas, does not lend itself to objective measures of expertise. In this particular study, selection of six participants was based on an institutionally endorsed measure of expertise: receipt of an award for teaching excellence either at an institutional level or at the national level. Receipt of such an award reflects peer and institutional recognition of performance. Additionally, an examination of the structures, processes and practices involved in teaching awards highlights institutionally endorsed discourses of ‘good teaching’ and hence teaching expertise. Techniques used in life history interviews were used to guide the two sessions with each participant.

Working with stories of the development of teaching expertise, I constructed three subtly different types of narratives: personal, social and reflexive narratives. In presenting these narratives, I use three particular contemporary conceptual frames to

examine the development of teaching expertise; (1) developing teaching expertise as lifelong learning; (2) developing expertise as situated learning; and (3) developing expertise as identity work.

One of the key contributions of this thesis is a reconceptualisation of the development of university teaching expertise to better reflect its dynamic, situated and relational nature. The thesis concludes with discussion of three practical strategies to support the development of teaching expertise at sites of practice: private and public writing, in particular, writing groups; the development of learning communities; and the deliberative management of relationships with students.